Executive Summary


Introduction

This report describes the results of a survey that evaluated the workshop “Searching for Excellence and Diversity: A Workshop for Search Committees,” held at the Rochester Institute of Technology (RIT) on December 20, 2013. Members of the Women in Science & Engineering Leadership Institute (WISELI) from the University of Wisconsin-Madison led this half-day workshop. The purpose of evaluating the workshop was to assess the perceived value or usefulness of the workshop components and of the workshop overall, the ways in which workshop participants anticipate using the information and materials provided in the workshop, and participants’ suggestions with regard to future planning and implementation of the search process at RIT.

The workshop was conducted by Eve Fine, WISELI Researcher and Curriculum Developer; Jennifer Sheridan, Executive and Research Director of WISELI; Amy Wendt, Professor of Electrical and Computer Engineering and WISELI Co-Director; and local facilitators at RIT. The local presenters included Jeremy Haefner, Provost and Senior Vice President for Academic Affairs; Kevin McDonald, Vice President and Associate Provost for Diversity and Inclusion; M. Renee Baker, Executive Director of Faculty Recruitment and Retention; and Erica Duthiers, Deputy General Counsel in the Office of Legal Affairs. Table 1 lists the workshop components and presenters.

Table 1: Workshop Components and Presenters

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<th>Workshop Component</th>
<th>Presenter(s)</th>
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<td>3. Run an Effective and Efficient Search Committee</td>
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<td>4. Actively Recruit an Excellent and Diverse Pool of Applicants</td>
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<td>9. Successfully Hiring Your Selected Candidate</td>
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<td>10. Conclusion</td>
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Methods

A survey was sent electronically to all 73 registered workshop attendees. The survey asked respondents to provide demographic information and to rate the overall workshop as “Not at all Useful,” “Somewhat Useful,” or “Very Useful.” In addition, the survey asked respondents to rate each workshop component as

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“Not at all Valuable,” “Somewhat Valuable,” or “Very Valuable” and to indicate whether they would recommend the workshop to others. Furthermore, the survey asked the attendees several open-ended questions, including questions on what they had learned, how they could apply what they had learned, how RIT could improve its search process, and how the workshop could be improved.

Results

Survey Respondent Demographics

Out of the 73 registered workshop attendees, 32 responded to the survey, for a response rate of 43.8%. Of the respondents, 18 (51.4%) were Assistant, Associate, or Full Professors; seven (20.0%) were Chairs; five (14.3%) were Administrators or Staff Members; and five (14.3%) were Deans. One respondent did not specify his or her title or position, and some respondents specified more than one title or role at RIT. Respondents identified a range of responsibilities in the search process, with 60.0% of respondents identifying themselves as department or search chairs.

Workshop Ratings

The vast majority of respondents indicated that they found the workshop useful, with 90.4% rating the overall workshop as either “Very Useful” or “Somewhat Useful.” Respondents rated the workshop components addressing the evaluation of the applicant pool, the fair and thorough review of candidates, and group discussion as the most valuable. The most highly rated component was the group discussion, with 71.9% of respondents rating it as “Very Valuable” and 25.0% rating it as “Somewhat Valuable.”

When asked if they would recommend the workshop to others, 76.7% responded “yes.” The most common theme among those who responded “no” was that the workshop did not present material that was new to them or that they had already mastered the material.

Knowledge Gained from the Workshop

The survey asked respondents to identify up to three things they learned at the workshop that they would apply as a search committee member. Respondents identified areas that included recognizing unconscious bias and minimizing its impact, defining values and group rules for a search committee, and considering the use of qualitative or multidimensional ratings scales to evaluate applicants.

In addition, respondents stated that they learned about the need to be judicious about online resources and information gathering during the recruitment process. Several respondents indicated that they learned about resources to support the search process.

Recommendations for Improving RIT Search Committee Processes and Education

When asked what they learned at the workshop that should be incorporated into RIT processes or education, respondents provided key input. Recommendations included considering modifications to the evaluation tools and strategies currently used, providing information on awareness of bias and the evaluation of candidates, and considering alterations more generally to the process currently used. Specific suggestions included moving to a system that assesses candidates without the use of numeric ratings and speeding up RIT’s search process by reducing bureaucracy.
When asked to identify the main obstacle that RIT faces in its effort to recruit and hire diverse faculty members, respondents cited a variety of factors. Such obstacles included the lack of a sufficiently diverse applicant pool from which to recruit, an inability to hire opportunistically, and unconscious biases in an insufficiently diverse environment. Several participants cited limited resources as an obstacle, including a lack of financial resources, start-up packages, and infrastructure for supporting research.

Respondents suggested a range of strategies for how RIT could improve the effectiveness of its efforts to recruit and hire a diverse and excellent faculty. Recommended strategies included emphasizing recruitment activities and responsibilities for search committee members. For example, one recommendation focused on networking with professional organizations, in order to actively recruit talented people who may not be in the job market yet. Another suggestion was for each search committee member to be responsible for identifying one diverse potential faculty candidate in his or her discipline and developing a relationship with that individual. Respondents also recommended that RIT offer more diversity training opportunities, such as this WISELI workshop, in the future.

Other suggestions focused on improving RIT’s recruitment process in several ways. For example, participants suggested increasing the speed of RIT’s recruitment process, in order to prevent RIT from losing good candidates due to the slowness of its process. In addition, they recommended re-allocation of resources during recruitment. One specific recommendation was for RIT to allocate fewer resources to programs like the Future Faculty Career Exploration Program and to re-direct such resources to help make appropriate contacts during the actual search process. Participants suggested increasing the collaboration among search committee members, the Office of Faculty Recruitment and Retention, and HR. For example, one recommendation was to involve faculty more in the administration of the search process.

Furthermore, participants recommended providing ongoing training and education to search committee members at RIT. Suggestions included providing more training at regular time intervals. One recommendation was for RIT’s Center for Professional Development (CPD) to offer training for search committee members so that all search committee members receive the same training and information. The suggestion was for each individual to repeat the training at regular intervals (e.g., once every three years) or whenever a process is changed. Participants recommended offering search committee training in a digital format.

Recommendations for Improvements to Future Workshops

Respondents provided several key recommendations that could be implemented to improve future workshops of this nature. Examples included highlighting research findings within each topic area, presenting a broader discussion of diversity (including gender diversity and LGBT diversity), covering topics in more depth, and incorporating more time for group discussion.

In addition, respondents expressed concerns that the workshop was too focused on compliance issues and recommended that RIT place more emphasis on helping departments to achieve their recruitment goals. Respondents suggested tailoring the workshop to identify and address RIT’s specific challenges.

Furthermore, participants cited several topics that they would have liked addressed in the workshop, yet were not. Topics included additional content areas, specific implementation strategies or best practices, and critical consideration of recruiting practices and recommendations. One suggested topic was disability issues in the hiring process, given the large deaf and hard-of-hearing population at NTID.
Participants indicated that the timing of the workshop in late December was not ideal. In the future, they recommended holding a workshop of this nature at the beginning of the academic year. This would prepare search committee members with valuable knowledge earlier in the recruitment process.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this WISELI workshop provided a forum in which participants gained useful knowledge on how to conduct an effective search process, from recruiting an excellent and diverse pool of applicants to successfully hiring selected candidates. In small groups, participants discussed the workshop topics. Survey respondents provided key insights regarding the major obstacles that RIT faces in recruitment and recommendations for improving the search process at RIT. In addition, they offered significant input on how to make workshops of this nature even more valuable to participants in the future.